

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DURBAN 00161 090947Z
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FM AMCONSUL DURBAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2857
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
INFO AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

C O N F I D E N T I A L DURBAN 0161

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: BENC, SF
SUBJ: MAJOR PROJECT: NEW RICHARDS BAY CHEMICAL PLANT

REF: STATE 54961

1. CONGEN OFFICER HAD OCCASION CALL ON RICHARDS BAY PORT CAPTAIN MARCH 6 AND RAISED QUESTION OF NEW CHEMICAL PLANT. PORT CAPTAIN INDICATED MOST INFORMATION ON PROJECT WAS STILL CONFIDENTIAL BUT WAS WILLING TO PROVIDE SOME DATA ON PROJECT OUTLINES. RATIONALE, HE SAID, WAS TO PRODUCE CERTAIN CRITICALLY IMPORTANT CHEMICALS WHICH HE EMPHASIZED "COULD NOT BE OBTAINED IN SOUTH AFRICA AFTER 1979". HE WOULD NOT ELABORATE ON WHAT THESE WERE. HE SAID PLANT WAS NOT RPT NOT PART OF LONG-POST-PONED PETROCHEMICAL COMPLEX ENVISIONED AT RICHARDS BAY. PLANT IS TO BE CONSTRUCTED ON EXTREME SOUTHEAST CORNER OF BAY, ADJACENT TO PRESENT COAL HANDLING FACILITY, NOT ON LAND SET ASIDE FOR PETROCHEMICAL COMPLEX ADJACENT ALUSAF PLANT ON BAY'S NORTHWEST CORNER. (DURBAN A-53 76 PROVIDED MAP FOR REFERENCE.) PORT CAPTAIN SAID PLANT WAS DEFINITELY NOT A REFINERY BUT WAS DESIGNED TO PROCESS PETROCHEMICALS IMPORTED IN BULK, RE-EXPORTING MOST OF THEM (PRESUMABLY MINUS
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LOCALLY-IMPORTANT ITEMS). PLANT WILL BE BUILT ON 12 ACRE SITE SOMEWHAT RESEMBLING ISLAND VIEW TERMINAL IN DURBAN HARBOR. (LATTER IS A TANK FARM FACILITY WITHOUT ANY REFINERY CAPABILITY USED PRINCIPALLY TO STORE PETROLEUM PRODUCTS AND BUNKERING FUELS.)

2. PORT CAPTAIN SAID HE THOUGH SENTRACHEM WOULD BE WILLING

TO DISCUSS DETAILS OF PROJECT SINCE IT WOULD "REQUIRE U.S. MATERIALS FOR PRODUCTION". HIS UNDERSTANDING WAS THAT PROJECT WAS FULLY APPROVED AND WORK WOULD START WITHIN 2-3 MONTHS WITH COMPLETION TARGET OF MID-1979. HE CONFIRMED SENTRACHEM STILL HAS NO OFFICE AT RICHARDS BAY AND HIS INFORMATION CAME FROM CONTACTS WITH EXECUTIVE FROM FIRM'S JOHANNESBURG HEADQUARTERS.

3. PROJECT PIQUES OUR INTEREST NOT ONLY AS POSSIBLE SIGNIFICANT TRADE OPPORTUNITY BUT ALSO AS A POSSIBLE SAG CRASH DEVELOPMENT OF PRODUCTION CAPABILITY FOR AN ITEM OR ITEMS THEY EXPECT TO HAVE DIFFICULTY OBTAINING AT SOME FUTURE POINT. WE WILL BE INTERESTED IN ANY DETAILS SENTRACHEM MAY IMPART TO ACG JOHANNESBURG.

4. PROTECT PORT CAPTAIN AS SOURCE.
FARBER

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